



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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BIRD MIGRATION THRILLS MILLIONS, BOOSTS ECONOMY, BUT LOSS OF HABITAT THREATENS MANY POPULAR SPECIES AND A RAPIDLY GROWING INDUSTRY

Millions of thrushes, warblers, tanagers, and other popular songbirds are winging back to the United States after spending the winter in Central and South America. And they're just in time for the third annual celebration of International Migratory Bird Day on May 13.

But the news is not all good for the 65 million American adults who enjoy watching and feeding wild birds, or for the Nation's economy, which benefits from the billions of dollars birders spend each year on everything from birdseed to binoculars to birding trips, according to two new economic reports.

The bad news is that the numbers of many popular bird species are in sharp decline. Populations of wood thrush, cerulean warbler, western bluebird, bobolink, and grasshopper sparrow all are falling at a rate of roughly 2 percent to 4 percent a year.

"Many Americans think we resolved the threat of a Silent Spring in the 1960s when the enactment of tough laws ended the use of many hazardous pesticides," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Mollie Beattie. "If Rachel Carson, a career Fish and Wildlife Service employee, were alive today, she would be expressing concern that we are again faced with a Silent Spring. Today, the greatest threat is the loss and fragmentation of habitat. The forests, wetlands, grasslands, and other areas that are home to these birds are being degraded and destroyed."

"Many people just aren't seeing the familiar songbirds they once took for granted," Beattie added. "Ironically, while bird numbers are declining, more and more people are spending money to enjoy them."

This year's International Migratory Bird Day will highlight the economic value of watching and feeding birds as well as the joys of the hobby.

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A study released by the Service, "The Economic Contribution of Bird and Waterfowl Recreation in the United States During 1991," indicates that, of the estimated \$18.1 billion Americans spend annually to watch wildlife, \$5.2 billion is spent on birdwatching, using the most conservative economic assumptions. The figure could run as high as \$9 billion, according to the report's author, Rob Southwick of Southwick Associates. Using conservative assumptions, the number of jobs supported by birdwatching is 200,000, according to the study.

A separate study released by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, for example, shows that birdwatchers visiting Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge pumped \$14.4 million into the economy of Hidalgo County, Texas. Birders spent \$9.7 million on their hobby while visiting Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia, according to the study, "The Economic Impact of Birding Ecotourism on Communities Surrounding Ten National Wildlife Refuges."

And all indications are the birdwatching and -feeding hobby is growing fast. The number of specialty stores selling wild birdseed, feeders, and equipment has exploded in recent years (the franchise chain Wild Bird Centers of America expanded from 5 stores in 1990 to more than 90 in 1995, while another chain, Wild Birds Unlimited, has grown to more than 200 stores) along with subscriptions to birdwatching magazines.

In comparison to the \$5.2 billion spent on birding, Americans spend \$5.8 billion on movie tickets and \$5.9 billion on tickets to sporting events such as football, baseball, and basketball. For wild birdseed alone, Americans spend an astonishing \$2 billion a year.

"When you consider that one out of three American adults feeds or watches birds and many people go on long trips to see birds, this enormous economic impact is not that surprising," Beattie said. "Birding is one of America's most popular, if not the most popular, outdoor activity."

"Over the long run, however, the decline of many species will have a negative effect on the economy if we don't take action now to conserve their habitat," Beattie said. "Quite simply, the jobs and livelihoods of people who make their living in the many businesses that support birdwatching are at risk if there are no birds to watch."

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International Migratory Bird Day is celebrated throughout the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean on the second Saturday in May, with more than 500 events scheduled at national wildlife refuges, city and state parks, national forests, national parks, National Audubon Society sites, and other nature reserves.

The day coincides with the northward migration of some 350 species of migratory birds, some of which travel 3,000 miles from wintering areas in South America. Known as neotropical migrants, these species include such popular species as the northern (Baltimore) oriole, wood thrush, and scarlet tanager.

International Migratory Bird Day is a featured event of "Partners in Flight," an international coalition organized by the non-profit National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and dedicated to reversing declines of migratory bird populations. The coalition includes 15 Federal agencies, all 50 state wildlife agencies, 35 conservation groups, and many academic institutions and corporations.

The coalition is particularly concerned with bird populations that have been in decline in recent decades and the overall conservation of bird habitat. Every state has species that are in decline and a state-by-state listing is attached.

Biologists say loss of vital habitat throughout North and South America and the Caribbean is the major reason for the decline of migratory birds. For example, the United States has lost more than half its wetlands, nearly all its tallgrass prairie, 75 percent of shortgrass prairie, and almost all of its virgin forest.

The IMBD Organizer's Packet, which includes fact sheets on habitat loss and the economics of birding and other information, is available from the Service. Write: International Migratory Bird Day, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Room 634, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, Virginia 22203.



FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Facts

U.S. Department of the Interior

**TOTAL RETAIL SALES, ECONOMIC IMPACT, AND JOBS
GENERATED FROM BIRD WATCHING/FEEDING**

STATE	RETAIL SALES (millions of dollars)	ECONOMIC IMPACT (millions of dollars)	JOBS
Alabama	54	112	1660
Alaska	121	205	2760
Arizona	128	251	3800
Arkansas	54	115	1800
California	622	1358	16180
Colorado	180	396	5360
Connecticut	56	110	1320
Delaware	11	21	250
Florida	477	897	13880
Georgia	50	104	1500
Hawaii	66	126	2200
Idaho	33	63	1080
Illinois	132	304	3760
Indiana	65	138	2090
Iowa	30	65	990
Kansas	24	57	810
Kentucky	57	122	1840
Louisiana	51	105	1560
Maine	65	114	2140
Maryland	83	159	2332
Massachusetts	124	239	3450
Michigan	268	512	7620
Minnesota	98	212	2910
Mississippi	35	77	1200
Missouri	165	287	5120
Montana	76	152	2590
Nebraska	23	49	800
Nevada	57	92	1290
New Hampshire	57	102	1590
New Jersey	88	182	2310
New Mexico	81	162	2420

New York	219	386	4610
North Carolina	92	195	3060
North Dakota	7	13	220
Ohio	123	200	3130
Oklahoma	55	99	1340
Oregon	94	180	2860
Pennsylvania	256	453	6040
Rhode Island	19	31	510
South Carolina	52	101	1720
South Dakota	21	40	760
Tennessee	76	161	2380
Texas	155	365	4730
Utah	57	120	1820
Virginia	108	216	3213
Vermont	23	42	660
Washington	136	274	4010
West Virginia	27	47	730
Wisconsin	225	482	7210
Wyoming	62	117	2090

UNITED STATES

(actual numbers)	\$5,238,915,000	\$15,892,285,000	191,000
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* Source: Southwick Associates, 1994